

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 ARAE-00 PM-04 CIAE-00 INR-07  
NSAE-00 AID-05 IGA-02 L-03 EB-08 TRSE-00 DODE-00  
SS-15 /067 W  
-----111817Z 025961 /53

P 111605Z APR 77  
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7221  
INFO AMEMBASSY LISBON

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 CARACAS 3573

FROM THE AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PFOR, SWEL, MOPS, VE, US  
SUBJECT: THE FAV C-130 CRASH--WHAT IS AT STAKE

REF: STATE 55696

1. I URGENTLY ASK THE DEPARTMENT AND DOD TO RECONSIDER THE QUESTION OF PRESENTING THE FAV WITH THE BILL FOR AIR-LIFTING THE BODIES OF THE RECENT C-130 CRASH. I DO SO UNDERSTANDING FULLY THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND BUREAUCRATIC CONSIDERATIONS OUTLINED IN REFTEL. BUT I DO SO WITH THE STRONG CONVICTION--SHARED I MUST SAY BY MY ENTIRE STAFF-- THAT, THOSE CONSIDERATIONS NOTWITHSTANDING, TO PRESENT THE FAV WITH THAT BILL WOULD BE A POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ERROR HAVING PREJUDICIAL EFFECT ON OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH VENEZUELA. WHAT IS INVOLVED HERE ARE PERCEPTIONS, IMAGES, EMOTIONS, NOTIONS ABOUT US, VALUES--THINGS IMPOSSIBLE TO RECORD IN A LEDGER AND THEREFORE DIFFICULT TO CONVEY EXCEPT BY AFFIRMATION. BUT THESE THINGS ARE MONETHELESS REAL FOR BEING INTANGIBLE, AND THEIR ADVERSE IMPACT ON OUR FRIENDSHIP AND THE VENEZUELAN'S ESTIMATE OF US WILL TRULY FAR EXCEED THE SUM AT ISSUE.

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2. LET ME TRY AGAIN TO POINT OUT WHAT IS AT STAKE. OUR ASSISTANCE WAS PERCEIVED BY THE NATION AND THE GOV AS A GENEROUS, HUMANITARIAN GESTURE, GIVEN AT A TIME OF GENUINE NATIONAL SHOCK AND GRIEF. TO VENEZUELAN, THE CRASH DID NOT SIMPLY KILL 68 VENEZUELAN. THE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO DIED COMPRISED THE ORFEON UNIVERSITARIO--

WHAT AMOUNTED TO A NATIONAL CHOIR, A GENUINE SYMBOL OF VENEZUELAN EXCELLENCE. THAT IS WHAT MADE THIS CRASH SO TRAGIC AND POIGNANT TO THE VENEZUELAN AND MADE OF IT MORE OF A NATIONAL TRAGEDY THAN JUST ONE PLANE CRASH. AND THAT IS WHY THE NATION LEAPT SO READILY TO SEE OUR ACTION AS ONE OF GENEROSITY, FRIENDSHIP, SOLIDARITY IN TRAGEDY.

3. I MIGHT ADD THAT THE CHOIR HAS BEEN REFORMED AND THE NEW ORFEON MADE ITS DEBUT OVER THE EASTER HOLIDAYS, A FACT WHICH HAS REAWAKENED THE MEMORIES AND SENSITIVITIES OF THE TRAGEDY. SIMILARLY, THE RECENT PAA/KLM 747 COLLISION IN THE APPROXIMATE SAME LOCALE TOUCHED DEEPER CHORDS THAN JUST THE ACCIDENT ITSELF--REMEMBRANCE, SOLIDARITY, SHARING OF SIMILAR SORROWS. AND THAT IS WHY THE PRESIDENT AND THE FOREIGN MINISTER PROMPTLY SENT MESSAGES OF CONDOLENCE TO THEIR US COUNTERPARTS. MESSAGES COST LITTLE, BUT IT IS WHAT THEY REFLECTED THAT I WANT TO UNDERLINE. IT IS THIS TOTAL SENSE OF SEEING IN US A GENEROUS SPIRIT AND OF HELP IN SORROW AND TRAGEDY THAT IS OPERATIVE HERE AND THAT HAS COME TO CONTRIBUTE MARKEDLY TO THE TEXTURE OF OUR CURRENT "ERA OF GOOD FEELINGS".

4. ANOTHER ELEMENT THAT ELEVATES THIS OUT OF THE ORDINARY IS THE FAV SENSITIVITY AND UNWILLINGNESS TO ACKNOWLEDGE CREW ERROR AS A PROBABLE CAUSE OF THE C-130 CRASH. THIS HAS ALREADY BEEN REPORTED IN 76 CARACAS 12670 AND 13239. IT SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD FOR WHAT IT IS--THE SINCERE, EVEN CONFIDENTIAL

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SUBCONSCIOUS, INABILITY OF THE FAV (AND THE NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS) TO ADMIT THAT THE FAV COULD HAVE MADE SUCH A DISASTROUS ERROR AND BE PARTIALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR HAVING DESTROYED A NATIONAL SYMBOL. PRESENTATION OF THE BILL WOULD HAVE A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON THE FAV. THOSE WITHIN THE FAV WHO WISH TO PLACE PARTIAL BLAME ON THE USAF FOR THE CRASH WOULD FEEL JUSTIFIED IN VOCALIZING WHAT MAY NOW BE ONLY AN EXPIATORY TEMPTATION. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE MEDIA WOULD PLAY UP THE USG INSISTENCE ON BEING PAID FOR WHAT THE NATION THOUGHT WAS A HUMANITARIAN MISSION. THE LINK WOULD BE MADE WITH CRASH SCAPEGOAT YEARNINGS WITHIN THE FAV, AND WITH AN EVEN WIDER EMOTIONAL SCAPEGOAT RELEASE OF PENT-UP SORROW AND TRAGEDY IN THE NATION AS A WHOLE.

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SS-15 /067 W

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P 111605Z APR 77  
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7222  
INFO AMEMBASSY LISBON

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 CARACAS 3573

FROM THE AMBASSADOR

THE RESULTING PUBLICITY MESS WOULD BE SEVERE, BUT  
ITS IMPACT ON OUR RELATIONS AND IMAGE WOULD BE EVEN  
MORE REGRETTABLE.

5. THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT VENEZUELA CAN PAY, BUT  
IT WOULD BE CRASS TO CONCEIVE OF THIS AS SIMPLY NOT  
GIVING OIL-RICH VENEZUELA A FREE RIDE. AGAIN WE SHOULD  
KEEP THIS ASPECT IN PERSPECTIVE. WE INSISTED ON THE REIM-  
BURSEMENT REQUIREMENT IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF THE  
CRASH WHEN THE FAV DESPARATELY SOUGHT OUR HELP TO GET  
THE BODIES BACK. IN THE EMERGENCY OF THE MOMENT THE  
OPERATING FAV STAFF LEVEL AGREED TO OUR REQUIREMENT. I  
DO NOT BELIEVE OUR REQUIREMENT WAS KNOWN AT HIGHER LEVELS  
OR BY THE PRESIDENT AND CERTAINLY NOT BY THE PUBLIC. THIS  
DOES NOT MEAN THE COMMITMENT WILL NOT BE HONORED. ON THE  
CONTRARY, THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT IF WE PRESENT THE BILL THE  
FAV WILL PAY IT. BUT IT WILL BE RESENTED AND THE REBOUND  
EFFECT WILL BE SEVERE.

6. THE POINT I AM TRYING TO MAKE IS THAT CIRCUMSTANCES  
HAVE MADE OF THIS ISSUE SOMETHING FAR MORE SERIOUS, FAR  
MORE SYMBOLIC, FAR MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN SIMPLY A QUESTION  
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OF BALANCING THE LEDGER. AND WE TREAT IT AS A ROUTINE  
BUREAUCRATIC MATTER OF "SOMEONE HAS TO PAY" AT OUR  
VERY GREAT RISK. WHAT IS AT STAKE HERE ARE REAL QUESTIONS  
OF FRIENDSHIP, HOW WE ARE SEEN AND HOW WE ARE BELIEVED.  
I DO NOT SUGGEST THAT OUR TOTAL RELATIONSHIP IS SO EPHEMERAL

AS TO COLLAPSE ON THIS ONE POINT. BUT I DO AFFIRM THAT IT WILL BE AFFECTED FAR MORE DEEPLY THAN ONE WOULD THINK FROM THE INTRINSIC NATURE OF THE ISSUE ITSELF, AND THAT VENEZUELA'S APPROACH TO US AND FUTURE WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE WITH US WILL BE CLOUDED. PRESENTING THE BILL WOULD BE THE PRECISELY WRONG THING TO DO AT THE PRECISELY WRONG TIME.

7. I THEREFORE WHOLEHEARTEDLY DISAGREE WITH REFTEL'S CONCLUSION THAT "THE POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS...ARE NOT IN THEMSELVES SUFFICIENT TO OVERCOME THE BUREAUCRATIC GUIDELINES". AND YET THAT PHRASING NEATLY ENCAPSULATES THE ISSUE. THAT IS JUST HOW THE VENEZUELAN'S WILL SEE IT-- THAT FRIENDSHIP, GENEROSITY, THE TRAGEDY ITSELF WERE JUST NOT IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO PUT ASIDE THE BUREAUCRATIC "GUIDELINES", AND THAT WHAT THEY THOUGH WAS HELP IN TIME OF SORROW AND A LARGE SPIRIT WERE REALLY ONLY "BUSINESS AS USUAL".

8. MY STAFF AND I THUS BELIEVE THAT WHAT WOULD NORMALLY BE A ROUTINE QUESTION IS NOW FRAUGHT WITH MORE SERIOUS CONSIDERATIONS, AND THAT FOR US TO ABSORB \$37,000 WOULD NOT ONLY BE IN THE US NATIONAL INTEREST IN TERMS OF OUR RELATIONS WITH VENEZUELA, BUT IT WOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH OUR OWN VALUES AND TRADITION.

9. ACTION REQUESTED. THAT THE DEPARTMENT AGAIN FIND SOME WAY TO ABSORB THIS COST, EVEN SEEKING CONGRESSIONAL APPROPRIATIONS IF NECESSARY, AS SUGGESTED EARLIER BY AMBASSADOR CARLUCCI (LISBON 1997).

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## Message Attributes

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